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RUEHKM/AMEMBASSY KAMPALA 2048  
RUEHNR/AMEMBASSY NAIROBI 4479  
RUEAIIA/CIA WASHDC  
RUEHGV/USMISSION GENEVA 1119  
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SUBJECT: A CREDIBLE PROCESS? ELECTION OBSERVERS WEIGH IN

¶1. (U) SUMMARY: In the days following Zimbabwe's national election, two independent observation missions -- SADC and the Pan African Parliament (PAP) -- released preliminary evaluations of the election. Despite noting serious irregularities in the pre-electoral environment, both missions deemed the election day processes credible and in accordance with standards set by regional bodies. In light of the projection of the Zimbabwe Election Support Network (ZESN) that Morgan Tsvangirai would come first in the presidential race, along with reports by civil society and the MDC of pre-election rigging and post-election delays, SADC's findings were widely criticized by opposition and civil society stakeholders. PAP's statement, which noted concerns over the delay in releasing the final results, was better received. END SUMMARY.

¶2. (SBU) On March 30, one day after voting and well ahead of the release of any results, the Southern African Development Community's (SADC) observer mission, comprised of 163 representatives from 11 of the 13 member states and chaired by Angolan Minister of Youth and Sports Jose Marcos Barrica, issued its preliminary statement on the election at a press conference in Harare. The chairman stated that despite problems in the pre-election process, the elections "have been a peaceful and credible expression of the will of the Zimbabwean people," in accordance with SADC guidelines for democratic elections. SADC's sentiments drew immediate ire from both civil society organizations and the opposition. MDC Secretary General Tendai Biti, who has repeatedly stated the

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election was not free and fair, questioned how SADC could lend credibility to an election that had yet to conclude. Other local observers questioned South Africa's deferment of mission leadership to the Angolan chairman, particularly in light of Angola's own electoral record. (NOTE: SADC-PF, the

Parliamentary Forum specializing in election observation, which has a reputation for neutrality, was barred from participating in the election by President Mugabe. END NOTE.) Notably, two representatives who are also members of South Africa's opposition Democratic Alliance, refused to sign the statement.

13. (U) On March 31, the PAP election observation mission held a press conference to release its interim statement. The PAP mission was comprised of 19 members of parliament (from both opposition and ruling parties) from five regions in Africa. PAP began by raising concerns about the pre-electoral environment, including unprofessional statements by security forces; excess printing of ballots; inadequate preparation of voters for new changes to the electoral process; and possible voter roll fraud, gerrymandering, and partisan dispersal of food. Despite these concerns, PAP concluded that voting on election day generally met basic standards for free and fair elections in accordance with the Organization of African Unity/African Union Declaration on the Principles Governing Democratic Elections in Africa. PAP based its conclusion largely on the preponderance of polling stations, the professional behavior of the majority of police officers present in and around stations, observer access, and the posting of initial results outside polling stations in accordance with new changes to the Electoral Act.

14. (U) However, PAP also emphasized that the post-election phase, which was part of the electoral process, remained a serious concern as the delay in announcing final results continued. PAP noted it had raised these issues with the chairman of the Zimbabwe Electoral Commission (ZEC), who responded that the ZEC had had trouble collecting results from remote areas. PAP stated it would continue to closely monitor the process and would make a final statement as soon

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as possible.

15. (SBU) COMMENT: SADC's whitewash of the electoral process, while disappointing, was to be expected. PAP's analysis was more objective; PAP left open the possibility of further criticism should ZANU-PF seriously manipulate the results. END COMMENT.

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